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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [UNHRC](#) [SZ](#)
SUBJECT: UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - SWISS APPROACH TO
SPECIAL SESSION

REF: A. DEPIRRO-URBAN EMAIL OF 7/6

[1](#)B. LAGON-URBAN EMAIL OF 7/5

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Carol Urban, Reasons 1.4 b/d

1.(C) In view of USG concerns about Switzerland's role at the UNHRC special session on the Gaza situation (refs A & B), Poloff today called Swiss DFA Human Rights Coordinator Wolfgang Bruehlhart to urge Switzerland not to break with Western Group consensus against the imbalanced OIC/Arab Group resolution. Rather than joining the US, Canada, and much of the EU in outright opposing the imbalanced resolution, Swiss officials -- under the explicit instruction of Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey -- have proposed several amendments which, if adopted, would make the OIC/Arab Group resolution only slightly more palatable, while possible splitting the Western Group.

2.(C) Bruehlhart defended the Swiss approach as an effort to encourage consensus. The Swiss want to break from the previous Human Rights Commission practice of naming and shaming, without providing constructive follow-through. For this reason, the Swiss were displeased by the condemnatory resolution against Israel during last week's HRC session. In the Special Session, Bern hoped to play a "bridge-building" role within the new HRC. The Swiss amendments are designed to call upon armed Palestinian groups to respect international humanitarian law and avoid violence against civilians, something the resolution demanded of the Israelis. Even at that, he said, the amendments may not be adopted by the OIC/Arab Group.

3.(C) Bruehlhart shared concerns about the current draft's call for the Special Rapporteur to visit the region. He strongly believed that the High Commissioner should go. Unfortunately, she had announced that she did not want to go to the region, because she did not believe she could fulfill her mission. Bruehlhart hoped that the Western Group members would join to convince her to fulfill her obligations.

4.(C) Returning to the resolution itself, Poloff stressed USG concern that if the Swiss amendments were adopted, the resulting resolution would still be imbalanced. This at the cost of dividing the Western Group. Poloff asserted that an HRC that focused its energy on Israel bashing and occasional America bashing was going to be deemed a failure by the American people. Bruehlhart agreed that the HRC could not degenerate into that type of body. He held out hope, though, that by the precedent of this Special Session, it will be easier for Western Group members to call future special sessions on

areas of concern like Sudan. Poloff expressed his skepticism that Non-Aligned Movement members would ever allow such special sessions to achieve anything constructive.

Comment

5.(C) Swiss FM Calmy-Rey is almost certainly the driving force behind the vigor of Swiss activity in Geneva -- the Swiss bureaucracy is more conscious of the need to keep in line with EU partners. That said, Swiss officials are quite critical of the current Israel incursion into Gaza, even while acknowledging Hamas' violent provocations. Embassy offers the following observations as to Swiss motivations:

-- Having, in their own view, midwived the Human Rights Council, the Swiss would now like to be the "grand mediator" of the Council and play the role of bridge builder and consensus achiever. Thus, they will tend to strive for compromise positions, even with regard to differences that, in our view, are irreconcilable and better left "unbridged." In striving for this special role, they will resist appearing subject to any group, even the Western Group.

-- As depositary state of the Geneva Conventions, the Swiss are also receptive OIC/Arab pressure to expound on actions in the "Occupied Territories." Poloff witnessed one resident Arab ambassador at Embassy's July 4th reception haranguing Swiss DFA Near East/Africa director Livia Leu for her country's role in pushing Red Cross/Red Crescent adoption of the Third Emblem, over OIC/Arab opposition, while not being vocal enough on the Gaza situation.

-- The Swiss, like their European neighbors, tend to view the

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Israeli/Palestinian conflict through a paternal, post-colonial lens, in which more is always demanded of the Israelis than of the Palestinians.

6.(C) In sum, the Swiss view their own stance as a delicate balance, even if we view things otherwise. We believe the best way to influencing their approach would be to achieve consensus with the EU, since Bern is generally not inclined to isolate itself from its EU neighbors.

Urban